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## Everyday discrimination in the Southern Andes<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

This article comes from an investigation of inequality and social exclusion in daily interactions in the Southern Andes of Peru. I ask, how are processes of discrimination or social hierarchy internalized, evaded, subverted or transformed in face-to-face interactions among individuals whose maternal language is Quechua or Spanish?

Before examining how discrimination plays out in daily interactions, I would like to briefly introduce the ways in which Quechua-speaking people have been discussed in social science literature. Scholars in the Andes have described how categorical labels such as Indian, *mestizo*, *criollo*, *cholo* work within interethnic relationships. These studies claim that individuals labeled “Indian” move from one category to another: from Indian to *cholo*, *cholo* to *mestizo*, and finally from *mestizo* to *criollo*. That is, ethnicity is framed as a gradient phenomenon that is always “in progress”. Indians become gradually modern by their assimilation to the Euro-westernized life of *mestizo* or *criollo*, their abandonment of certain practices, and their migration to the cities. “Migration” for many scholars (see Cannessa 1999) implies a radical change of Indian ethnic status. In other words, an Indian going to the city becomes a *cholo* (an urbanized Indian), and in the long run a *mestizo* (Cannessa 1999: 72).

This gradualism in interethnic relationships – a concept shared by many Andean scholars – was pointed out by Mason more than 40 years ago (1966). Mason asserted that bureaucratic employees, intellectuals, and other elites share the idea that Indians need to evolve from their traditional to a modern culture. The implication is that Indians need to disappear in order to achieve progress because they are “alien to modernity”, as the literary critic Jean Franco points out (2006). Those who speak a language other than Spanish have been and are still being stigmatized, blamed for the unsuccessful or partial modernization of the nation. This ideology, according to Franco, “derive[s] from a discursive formation that homogenizes and simplifies indigenous identity without regard to the historical sedimentation of discrimination” (Franco 2006: 176).

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1 This article is offered as posthumous homage to Dr. Erwin Frank for his teachings while I was his student at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales – Quito (Ecuador).

The idea that Indians become modern if they become *mestizo* or *criollo* implies that progress can be achieved only by acculturation or assimilation, i.e., *mestizaje*. *Mestizaje* implies *blanqueamiento*, or “whitening” as Safa translated the word (2005: 311) in which the highest model is assumed to be *mestizo* or *criollo*. *Mestizaje* was and still is, in some Latin American countries, a way to “forge a unified and homogenous national image ... and reassert the supremacy of western civilization” (2005: 307).

As MacCormack (2006) points out, *mestizaje* understood as a merging of cultures, “races”, and languages cannot be the model on which a country becomes a nation, because “different groups ... have their own ways of creating and interpreting meaning, ways that remain distinct” (MacCormack 2006: 23). That is, in daily cross-cultural interactions in both less or more formal settings, homes, schools, or health clinics – different meanings emerge for different participants. Indigenous people may interpret differently relationships they have with other people, as well as with material things, such as land, art, and books (MacCormack 2006: 27).

Below I examine how processes of discrimination or social hierarchy are displayed in daily interactions in a village’s health facility. These processes are then linked to images of highlanders circulated by coastal congress persons.

## 2. A general background

### 2.1 The village

Occopata (Uqhupata in Quechua) lies on the border between Paruru and Cuzco province, and belongs to the municipality of Santiago, seated in Cuzco. It is under the charge of the municipality which bigger concerns seem to be that any countryside Quechua-speaking village like Uqhupata must be developed and lead toward “modernity”. In this light the mayor of Santiago and his subordinates concentrate their efforts on modernizing and urbanizing the village.

Agents from the municipality, for example, urge women to organize their households according to particular ways. They check the organization of household utensils, and kitchen and bathroom hygiene in their weekly visits. Some villagers like to joke about agents visits while having breakfast or a break from farming. One they like to tell is the following:

*Asuki prisirintiq wasinman risqa. Mana pipas kasqachu. Hawapi ch'uñu manka chuqarayashasqa. Asukiqa mankata h'aytaspa k'uchumanraq aparqaripusqa.*<sup>2</sup>

Asuki went to the village president’s home. No one was there. A pot with cooked dry potatoes sat outside the patio. Asuki kicked the pot until it ended up in the corner of the patio (Fieldnotes 2009).

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2 Quechua and Spanish are in italic font; both languages were translated into English by the author.



Department of Cusco, District of Santiago

(after <[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/ec/Peru\\_-Cuzco\\_Department\\_\(locator\\_map\).svg/250px-Peru\\_-Cuzco\\_Department\\_\(locator\\_map\).svg.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/ec/Peru_-Cuzco_Department_(locator_map).svg/250px-Peru_-Cuzco_Department_(locator_map).svg.png)> and <[http://www.map-peru.com/mapa/Cusco/271\\_cusco-santiago.png](http://www.map-peru.com/mapa/Cusco/271_cusco-santiago.png)> (05.02.2012).

All participants usually laugh, but sometimes women get annoyed and make comments such as

*Maypi mankatari hayt'anman, mankari imanashantaqri.*

How dare she kick the pot; the pot is not doing anything to her, is it? (Fieldnotes 2009).

### 3. The villagers

Uqhupata villagers refuse to be categorized under any racial label (e.g., peasant or *runa* – a finding that runs counter to orthodox positions on social identity in the Andes). Villagers emphasize that the *runa* label refers to a human being without any essential, ethnic overtone. It demands that they be recognized not only as human beings, but also on their own term, as persons capable of being accountable and legitimate interlocutors like any non-villager. They want to understand others and to be understood by others, as was pointed out by a villager:

*Runama riki kashayku, manama alquchu.*

We are humans. We are not dogs (Interview #4, 2009).

#### 4. The health facility

The village health facility stands between the two Uqhupata main streets. It was built during the 1970s as a community health center. The Ministry of Health gave the funds for building materials and the villagers contributed with their labor force and adobe bricks. It is a one story building with a backyard and a patio.

Of the building's five rooms, there are three examining rooms. One stores medicines, and another patient records, a sterilization chamber, a computer with a printer, and office supplies. These rooms are distributed around a waiting room (also used as hallway to access the other rooms).

The majority of patients are women and children, some elderly people, and high school students. Few men seek health care; sometimes they bring their child or come with their wife to register their newborn. Patients arrive early in the morning for unscheduled treatment or an appointment. When the waiting room gets crowded, patients wait and converse on the patio, or play with their child.

Within examining rooms several types of interaction happen between patients and government representatives. One example is prenatal care in the biggest examining room. From the door one can see the representative's desk, two chairs, and a metallic shelf with medical records, pregnancy cards, and notebooks. On the desk are the prescription drug forms, infant records cards, and patient medical records. The representative fills out the general database with the previous patient's data. A patient (P) enters with her baby wrapped up in an *unkhuña* (woven cloth) and sits facing the representative. The representative (R), after few minutes asks,

R: *Niway este- imawan kuydakunki qan (.) ah?*

P: *Mana siñurita kuyrakuymanchu*

R: *¿Por qué? Otro wawa kanqa*

P: *Umayman siñurita atakawan*

R: Tell me this- what contraceptive method will you control with (.) ah?

P: Miss, I won't use any method ((facing the representative))

R: Why? You will have another baby ((reviewing a sheet of the medical record))

P: It gives me terrible headaches.<sup>3</sup>

Confronted with the patient's refusal to use a contraceptive method, the representative asserts that the patient does not want to take care of herself. The patient becomes

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3 I recorded natural conversations in the village clinic during fieldwork time (2008-2010). They have been transcribed following the system of transcription of Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974). For example, a dot (.) indicates a micro pause; words included within double parenthesis (( )) indicate the transcriber's comment. The transcription was translated into English by the author.

silent and begins to swing her feet. Ignoring the patient's headaches and insisting on the necessity of using a contraceptive method, mixing Spanish and Quechua, the representative adds:

R: ... *y después ashkha wawa kanqa y imaynalla kanqa (.) imaynata qan uywakunki (.) mana wawata aqna animalhinachu kanan (.) solo waka (.) oveja chunka (.) tawa (.) pisqa comunlla (.) qan humano kanki igual nuqa hina (.) no cierto?*

R: ... and after [that] there will be a lot of babies and what would be (.) how will you take care of (.) babies cannot come into being like an animal (.) only cows, sheep (have), four, five, ten offspring without any care (.) you are human like me (.) right?

The patient does not utter anything; she hands over her health insurance form and keeps silent, holding her baby on her lap while the representative fills out the attendance form. The representative – despite her best intentions and assumptions that she is complying with her job requirements – reveals a stereotype about Quechua-speaking women: Women who deliver more than three children are like animals, which is conveyed by animal *hinachu*, a judgment that is even more severe in Quechua than it would be in Spanish or English. Those who have more than three children resemble cows or sheep: *solo waka oveja tawa, pisqa, chunka comunlla*. They are not human beings.

The categorization of those who refuse to use a contraceptive method as animal in contrast to humans undermines those with a Quechua background (e.g., villagers), as well as puts in question their status as human beings capable of decisions about their health, well-being, and any other aspect that concerns them. If women have more than three children, they are aligned with those who do not know how to control or care their body.

Such racialization appears in other, national level practices as well, such as those of congress persons and ministers. I examine below the way a coastal congress person categorizes people from the highlands not only as animals who lack understanding or reasoning capabilities.

## 5. Being llama or vicuña

At the beginning of a 2006 interview with a prominent coastal politician, a journalist found himself immediately at an impasse. Arturo Escobar, the journalist<sup>4</sup> was at the Peruvian Parliament building with congressman<sup>5</sup> Antero Flores to interview him about the *Tratado de Libre Comercio* (Free Trade Treaty – FTT) with the United States. The discussion regarded the congressional vote on a proposal for a referendum about whether or not the FTT was worth pursuing as part of a neoliberal government approach. The journalist (J) asks the congressman (Cm):

J: ¿Y usted cree, congresista, que debe aprobarse el referéndum sobre el tratado de libre comercio?

Cm: Noooo, ¿le vas a preguntar a las llamas y vicuñas sobre el tratado de libre comercio?

J: And do you believe, Congressman, that the referendum on the FTT issue should be approved by a referendum?

Cm: Nooo, are you going to ask *llamas* and *vicuñas*<sup>6</sup> about the FTT?

Flores categorically rejects the idea of consulting Peruvians about the FTT. He argues that one cannot ask *llamas* and *vicuñas* who are closer to nature than to culture (see Cadena 2008: 27).<sup>7</sup> Llamas and vicuñas do not belong to the cultured milieu of coastal elite dwellers. They belong to the highland, their quintessential geographical space. It is the place for those who are less human and stagnated in relation to coastal dwellers.<sup>8</sup> Thus, people living in the highland – including Quechua and Spanish speakers – are *llamas* and *vicuñas*, merely animals who do not have the brain power to understand the FTT.

The congressman's response also sounds like it presupposes that the interviewer shares his point of view. First, he addresses the journalist with the second person, as if

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4 Escobar's whole interview can be listened at <[http://www.ideeleradio.org.pe/look/portal/33\\_lbp\\_columnista.tpl?IdLanguage=13&IdPublication=7&NrSection=60&tpid=75ALStart=27](http://www.ideeleradio.org.pe/look/portal/33_lbp_columnista.tpl?IdLanguage=13&IdPublication=7&NrSection=60&tpid=75ALStart=27)> (18.12.2009).

5 Antero Flores was a member of the *Partido Popular Cristiano* (Popular Christian Party – PPC), a right wing Peruvian party. He was a congressman during Toledo's administration. By the end of 2006, he became the official representative on behalf of Peru in the Organization of American States (OAS) under the current government. In December 2007 he was appointed as Minister of Defense by the former president Garcia.

6 In Quechua *wik'uña*, it is a wild South American camelid of the Andes.

7 A sound analysis of racializing people in Latin America through discourse about their relationship to the natural environment can be found in Graham (1990) and Stepan (1991).

8 According to this line of thinking those who move from the highlands to the coast are "migrants" by virtue of displacing themselves from their "natural" environment. Highlanders may remain in the midst of their own incapability to change their "stupid" behavior. Therefore, they could be *cholos* by changing their external appearances, but not their inner lack of intelligence.

they are on familiar terms, and second, the congressman ostensibly consults with the journalist about his own behavior, suggesting that he too, if put in the same position, would act in the same way.

The phrase *le vas a preguntar* also implies that if someone is willing to ask highlanders after a matter as delicate as the FTT, he has to be out of his mind. The congressman, confronted with resistance to his point of view, reasserts his position.

Cm: *Bueno, es tu opinión, si no te gusta, me voy. Esa es mi opinión. Un tema técnico no les puedes preguntar. Es una barbaridad. No les puedes preguntar a toda la ciudadanía. Al que no sabe leer y escribir, no le vas a preguntar eso.*

Cm: Well, it is your opinion; if you do not like it, I will leave. That is my opinion. A technical/professional topic you cannot ask (them). It makes no sense. You cannot ask all citizens (about it). You cannot ask those who cannot read and write about that.

He argues that *llamas* and *vicuñas* – in reference to people – were not de facto offensive terms, that was just the journalist's opinion. The congressman shows that he is ready to end the interview if his interlocutor is not pleased with his equation of animals to highlanders. He tries to align the journalist with his line of thinking by including him in his utterances through the familiar second person in the phrases *no les puedes* (twice) and *no les vas*. The interviewee implicitly says that he regards the interviewer as a member of his peer group, who understands the FTT and any other topic that involves an intellectual skill or reasoning process.

The congressman claims that he could not consult on something as technical as the FTT with regular citizens, let alone those who cannot read and write the national language (Spanish). In the last segment of his utterance, he clarifies that he refers to those highlanders who lack literacy in Spanish, excluding those who are literate in it. This rewording to repair and align the journalist to the congressman's line of thought is rejected.<sup>9</sup>

The congressman's categorization of highlanders, particularly those who are illiterate as animals seems to reflect the government representative's categorization of Quechua-speaking women. Both the congressman and other government representatives attribute lack of understanding and reasoning skills to highlanders to consider issues of the Free Trade or controlling pregnancies. Animals (*llamas*, *vicuñas*, cows, or

9 It is worth noting that other Peruvians, depending on their circumstances, may accept their inclusion within the elite's group. Sometimes provincial intellectuals are trapped in this racialized discourse and produce sophisticated scholarly work to be recognized as coastal dwellers peers. Those called *llamas* or *vicuñas* are those who have a Quechua rather than Spanish background – regardless if they live in the highlands. The most outstanding example is Aníbal Quijano's treatise over *cholos*. For details see Quijano (1980).

sheep) cannot understand anything. Paradoxically the congressman in his utterance included all highlanders, that is, not only those with Quechua background, but also those with Spanish background. Whereas the government representative labeled as animal the woman who refused to use any contraceptive method.

Although the congressman tries to clarify that he is referring to those who are illiterate, there is no doubt that he implies all highlanders. However, the opposition distinguishing literate from non-literate Spanish highlanders can lead us to discuss another social hierarchy, highlanders who dwell in the city and command Spanish as a first language replicate the racism that coastal people direct at them. Spanish-literate highlanders attempt to disassociate themselves from those having a Quechua background, associating them with a lack of reasoning capabilities or intelligence.

The racialization of highlanders as animals informs the face-to-face interactions of congress people among themselves as well. An event occurred in the Parliament chamber, in which a bill under discussion was racistly dismissed. The bill, proposed by Quechua-speaking congresswomen Sumire (Cw1) and Supa (Cw2), called for the diffusion and preservation of aboriginal languages.<sup>10</sup> Their peer, congresswoman Hildebrandt (Cw3), considered the bill useless: “*No sirve para nada*” (“it is worthless”). When Cw1 and Cw2 interrupted her vehement argument, she pointed out:

Cw3: *Miren los modales de estas niñas quechuahablantes* ((turning her head and pointing with her index finger at Cw1 and Cw2)) *no me dejan hablar*.<sup>11</sup>

Cw3: Look at the manners of these Quechua-speaking girls ((turning her head and pointing with her index finger at Cw1 and Cw2)) they do not let me talk.

Cw1 and Cw2 then contest the argument that Quechua is worthless, i.e., that speakers of the language are worthless people. Cw3<sup>12</sup> intends to continue with her allocution by calling attention to the supposedly bad behavior of the Quechua-speaking congresswomen. The phrase *miren los modales* refers to a person who does not know how to behave properly in an official and public setting such as the Parliament chamber. The phrase *estas niñas quechuahablantes* refers to Cw1 and Cw2 as Quechua-speaking children. It is implied that even though these Quechua-speaking individuals have been elected as representatives, they are *estas*, a bunch of undesirable, childlike things (objects), below the social standing of the Cw3.

10 See details at “Proyecto de Ley para La Preservación, Uso y Difusión de las Lenguas Aborígenes del Perú (<<http://servindi.org/pdf/PyLenguasOriginarias.pdf>>; 12.12.2009).

11 See the full video clip at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XE0BRpreisE&feature=related>>; 17.04.2008). The comments happened on 06.09.2007.

12 Hildebrandt has been a congresswoman since the 1990s as a member of Fujimori's political party.



According to this view, “childish ideas” such as the aboriginal language bill are worthless; its proponents’ utterances or point of view are also worthless. The implication is that all those who speak Quechua cannot succeed in gaining total adulthood; they will always remain children despite being able to speak Spanish<sup>13</sup> and dealing with bills and other topics related to legislation within the Parliament.

Cw3 also claims a superordinate position by arguing that she is treated unfairly by their interrupting her, which she signals by *no me dejan hablar*. If Quechua-speaking individuals are regarded as children, they are supposed to offer deference by conceding the floor to Cw3 and allowing her to speak as long as she wants.

## 6. We are like you ...

The congresswoman’s contempt toward those who live in the highlands or have a Quechua background is not peculiar to her. It is shared by congressmen, ministers and broadcasters. What is more interesting, is that Cw3’s contempt and disgust is fractally played out by dwellers in the highland. While highlanders are regarded as animals lacking reason by coastal political elites, some city-dwelling, Spanish-speaking highlanders claim a superordinate position over those who dwell in rural areas and whose first language is Quechua.

As it has been shown in daily face-to-face interactions, racialization happens constantly and persistently, in which the main highlighted difference is the lack of reasoning or capacity to understand, and whose main recipients are usually highlanders with a Quechua language background. At a national level, coastal elites also include highlanders with a Spanish language background in their racist stereotypes.

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13 A Peruvian business-man pictured northern farmers, “*ellos son como niños no saben lo que quieren*” (“they are like children they do not know what they want”). See the whole article at <[http://ideeleradio.org.pe/look/portal/33\\_lbp\\_columnista.tpl?IdLanguage=13&IdPublication=7&NrSection=60&tpid=75&ALStart=27](http://ideeleradio.org.pe/look/portal/33_lbp_columnista.tpl?IdLanguage=13&IdPublication=7&NrSection=60&tpid=75&ALStart=27)> (30.12.2009).

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